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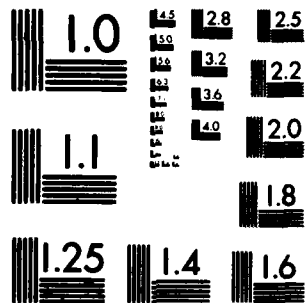
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20 NOVEMBER 1981

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THE LIMITS OF  
SUPERPOWER INTERVENTION:

AFRICA



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**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013**

**THE LIMITS OF SUPERPOWER  
INTERVENTION: AFRICA**

**by**

**Robert J. Lilley**

**20 November 1981**

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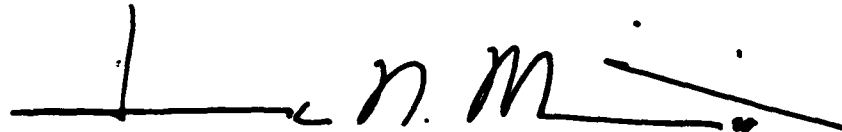
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## **FOREWORD**

This memorandum examines the limitations to superpower military involvement in sub-Saharan Africa. The author analyzes those elements of the African dynamic which inhibit such involvement, such as African nationalism and the issue of majority rule in Southern Africa among others. Superimposed on those limitations dictated by Africa itself are those limits that the superpowers place on themselves. The author concludes that superpower competition in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly military competition, will increase in the coming years and offers recommendations for the United States to increase its chances for success within these limitations.

The Strategic Issues Research Memoranda program of the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, provides a means for timely dissemination of analytical papers which are not constrained by format or conformity with institutional policy. These memoranda are prepared on subjects of current importance in strategic areas related to the authors' professional work.

This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. N. M.', is written over a horizontal line.

**JACK N. MERRITT**  
Major General, USA  
Commandant

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROBERT J. LILLEY** has been assigned to the Strategic Studies Institute since October 1979. A graduate of the US Military Academy, he holds a master's degree in African history from Northwestern University. He is a member of the Foreign Area Officers Program specializing in sub-Saharan Africa. He has been assigned in this capacity on the Department of Army Staff and, more recently, as an instructor at the US Army Command and General Staff College.

## **SUMMARY**

The size and strategic location of the African Continent, its plethora of natural resources, fragility, and instability of its varied political systems; and the lack of clear, political ideologies have all conspired to encourage superpower intervention and competition in sub-Saharan Africa. The results of such superpower involvement, however, have been mixed.

Generally, the failures of the superpowers are attributable to a lack of understanding of the limitations to such intervention in sub-Saharan Africa. There are limitations imposed by Africa itself, based on historical experience and economic realities as well as self-imposed limitations.

The former include African nationalism, sanctity of international borders, support for majority rule, noninterference in internal African affairs, and economic issues. The latter include resource constraints; lack of consensus on policy; the risk involved, particularly in regard to the other superpower's reaction; ideology; and public opinion.

There is little doubt that the United States is going to become more involved militarily on the African Continent in the coming years. As in other regions, political and economic relationships will often lead to military connections. Certainly the base rights and security assistance agreements with Somalia and Kenya imply a desire for long-term military relationships with those countries. Similarly, there appears to be no weakening of our military relations with old friends such as Liberia and Zaire, among others, despite the potential political liabilities. Remote military possibilities include antiterrorist operations, evacuation missions, or perhaps some form of peacekeeping. Indeed, a continued Soviet military presence in sub-Saharan Africa almost necessarily dictates an increased US military involvement.

The United States, therefore, must be aware of the limitations of such military involvement and intervention in sub-Saharan Africa both as they affect Soviet initiatives and increase the chances of US success.



## **THE LIMITS OF SUPERPOWER INTERVENTION: AFRICA**

The continent of Africa is immense. Covering 11.5 million square miles, it ranks second only to Asia as a continental land mass. From the westernmost point at Dakar, Senegal to the tip of the Horn in Somalia stretches a distance of approximately 5,000 miles. Similarly, the straight line distance between the Strait of Gibraltar and the Cape of Good Hope measures some 4,800 miles. Within the continent are found huge quantities of raw materials of increasingly vital importance to the United States, Japan, and the West, and to a lesser degree to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. Ray S. Cline of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University has termed sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Central and Southern Africa as:

. . . a geostrategic zone that is a rich treasure-house of industrial raw materials—a prime target for the USSR because of the area's political weakness and its crucial value as a trading partner for Western Europe, Japan, and the United States.'

The physical location of this huge continent is also significant. Many of the world's strategic lines of communication pass through chokepoints controlled at least partially by African states: the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Mozambique Channel,

the Cape of Good Hope, and the Strait of Gibraltar. In addition, as part of the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean littorals it is intricately enmeshed in Middle East and South Asian affairs and consequently in world affairs.

Partially as a result of its size and the crossroads nature of its location, Africa is unrivaled in geographic, economic, political, linguistic, and ethnic diversity.

In the political realm, prior to 1957, only four independent states existed in Africa South of the Sahara—Ethiopia, Liberia, Sudan, and South Africa. In just a little over 10 years, 32 more sovereign, independent states were created on the continent, with four more following in the 1970's. "No comparable political transformation in such a compressed period of time has ever occurred before in the history of the world."<sup>2</sup> At the present time, there are 46 independent nations in sub-Saharan Africa with Namibia virtually certain to gain its independence in this decade. The only common characteristic of these 46 states, however, is their independent status, and some would even dispute "independent" as a proper adjective for some African nations. Their political systems range the entire political spectrum, including Marxist People's Republic (Angola, Mozambique), constitutional democracies (Nigeria), one party states of both left and right (Ivory Coast, Tanzania), monarchies (Lesotho, Swaziland), military dictatorships (Benin, Ethiopia, Mauritania), and at least one anarchic state (Chad). Until recently there were also such aberrant regimes as the Central African Empire of Emperor Bokassa I and Uganda under Idi Amin. And finally, there are the white minority regimes of South Africa and Namibia.

The states of sub-Saharan Africa are not only new and diverse, but for the most part they are not even territorial states or nation-states. In many areas artificial boundaries are in dispute, and linguistic and ethnic loyalties often take precedence over loyalty to the concept of a national state. For example, while most governments promote the language of the former colonial powers as the official language, there are still 57 local languages each spoken by more than one million people.<sup>3</sup>

Economically, sub-Saharan Africa exhibits similar diversity with huge disparities in size, population, and natural resources. At one extreme are states such as Sao Tome and Principe with an area of 372 square miles, a population of 80,000, a Gross Domestic

Product (GDP) of \$160 per capita, and no known natural resources. At the other extreme is Nigeria with an area of 357,000 square miles, a population of 80 million, a GDP per capita of \$522.6, and an abundance of oil among other minerals.<sup>4</sup> Probably the greatest disparity is in vital mineral resources which, although abundant, are concentrated in only a handful of African states. Furthermore, whatever the sources of wealth in a particular country, it is generally distributed on a grossly unequal basis. For example, South Africa's GDP per capita of \$1,596 is misleading as virtually all the economic benefits of this mineral-rich state accrue to the affluent white minority which constitutes 20 percent of the population. Thus, the black subcontinent is divided among have and have-not states and between haves and have-nots within these countries.

As a result of this great diversity and uneven distribution of peoples and resources, sub-Saharan Africa has been the scene of unprecedented conflict and instability in its brief history of independence. Secessionist movements in Zaire, Nigeria, and the Sudan nearly dismembered those countries. General authority no longer exists in Chad where possibly eight armed factions compete for power. Ethiopia continues to battle insurgents in Eritrea, throughout Ogaden, and elsewhere in this ancient empire. Regular armed forces from Somalia, Tanzania, and South Africa have invaded their neighbors, and irregular forces have twice invaded Zaire. Portugal fought three long wars in a vain attempt to retain its colonies in Portuguese Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique. At the dawn of the 1980's, shooting wars continue in the Western Sahara, Chad, Angola, Namibia and Ethiopia while a tenuous peace holds in Zaire, Uganda, Zimbabwe and South Africa. In addition, the African propensity to change governments via military coup constantly threatens the stability of many states.

*Superpower Intervention.* The size and strategic location of the African Continent; its plethora of natural resources concentrated in a few key countries; the newness, fragility, and instability of its varied political systems; and the lack of clear political ideologies have all conspired to encourage superpower intervention and competition in sub-Saharan Africa. The deployment of Cuban combat forces to Angola and Ethiopia on behalf of the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 1970's signified the spread of East-West military competition to the African Continent which

heretofore had remained relatively immune to such rivalry. Similar Western interventions included coalition operations in Shaba Province in Zaire not once but two times; the French-sponsored overthrow of Emperor Bokassa I in the former Central African Empire; and the British Commonwealth peacekeeping operations in Zimbabwe, among others. More recently, events in Southwest Asia have underscored the military importance of the Indian Ocean and prompted base rights agreements between the United States and the governments of Kenya and Somalia, presumably on a relatively permanent basis.

The results of such superpower involvement, however, have been mixed. On the one hand, the Soviet Union and its Cuban allies have not been successful in resolving the ongoing conflicts in Angola and Ethiopia. In addition, Moscow has suffered well-publicized setbacks in Egypt, Somalia, the Sudan, and possibly in Guinea, one of its staunchest clients in the past. On the other hand, the United States has yet to resolve the political, social, and economic problems in Zaire—problems which have continuously threatened to tear this resource-rich client apart since its independence in 1960. Similarly, the United States has “lost” Ethiopia, and its position in Liberia could be in jeopardy depending upon future political evolution or revolution there.

Despite these reverses and failures, current trends indicate continued, if not increased, superpower intervention in Africa. There is little doubt that the Soviet Union views, and will continue to view, Africa as a legitimate arena for low-risk competition with the West. In this competition Moscow relies heavily on the military instruments of diplomacy. As Robert Legvold points out:

... the Soviet Union's apparent eagerness to secure the use of an even larger number of facilities wherever the remotest possibility exists—from Portugal to Mozambique—adds further evidence that it intends to have military power readily at hand in areas like Africa.<sup>1</sup>

This strategy is not going to be abandoned, for as noted by Colin Legum, “it would require nothing short of a major reversal of Gorshkov's strategy for the Soviets to lose interest in any of these areas (the Horn, Southern Africa, the bulge of West Africa, and the Southern littoral of the Mediterranean) . . . .”<sup>2</sup> If for no other reason than that of increased Soviet involvement, US military involvement in sub-Saharan Africa also will increase, facilities

access agreements with Somalia and Kenya being initial steps in the process. As former Secretary of Defense Brown has projected in his Department of Defense Annual Report for 1981:

... we anticipate increased US security assistance programs in the years ahead to meet the growing requirements of developing local defense forces, and also because we wish to offer the African states an alternative to excessive reliance on the Soviet bloc for equipment, training, and advisors.'

*Purpose.* Generally, the failures of the superpowers in sub-Saharan Africa are attributable to a lack of understanding of the limitations to superpower intervention in Africa. These limitations are of two types. The first are those limitations imposed by Africa itself, based primarily on Africa's historical experience and economic realities. The second are those limitations which are imposed by the superpowers themselves, such as resource constraints and domestic considerations. If superpower competition will continue to be a fact of life in sub-Saharan Africa in the coming years, an analysis of these limitations would be instructive.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to determine these limitations to superpower intervention in sub-Saharan Africa. The following section discusses the limitations imposed by Africa, followed by a section which considers those imposed by the superpowers themselves. The concluding section recommends policy options for the United States to compete more effectively with the Soviet Union within those limitations.

Throughout this paper, the term superpower will refer solely to the United States and the Soviet Union, although reference will be made to other major powers, mainly the former colonial powers. Intervention is defined as a wide range of military activities from security assistance to the commitment of combat power.

And finally, the paper will discuss these limitations in terms generally applicable to the continent as a whole. It should be recognized, however, that because of the immense size and divers of sub-Saharan Africa, there may be exceptions to these general rules. Nevertheless, limitations applicable in specific countries will be highlighted where they are of special significance to either the United States or the Soviet Union.

## **AFRICAN-IMPOSED LIMITATIONS**

*General.* In 1963, 31 African heads of state gathered in Addis Ababa and formed the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Ababa and formed the Organization of African Unity (OAU). While the achievements of the OAU have been more ephemeral than real during the intervening years, the charter of the OAU enunciates certain principles that all member-states are pledged to uphold. These principles, in turn, form the yardstick against which superpower activities in Africa will be judged. More recently the North-South dialogue provides additional guidelines which Africa, along with the rest of the Third World, wishes to impose on the superpowers. This is not to say that Africa can physically resist any overt intervention on the part of the superpowers, but rather that it can exert considerable moral suasion in regional and international fora to the severe embarrassment and discomfort of the superpowers. An example is the perennial drive to introduce a UN resolution imposing a total economic embargo on the Republic of South Africa, a resolution that the United States consistently opposes despite the negative publicity that ensues. Furthermore, the lessons of the 1973 Arab oil embargo are not lost on those African states possessing raw materials vital to the superpowers. Nigeria has already exercised the oil weapon against its neighbors and nationalized British Petroleum assets due to that company's trade relations with South Africa.

*African Nationalism and Nonalignment.* African nationalism is a direct reaction to Africa's colonial heritage. Basil Davidson describes the colonial period and its aftermath as follows:

Viewed across the skylines of history, the colonial period has been little more than an episode, even a brief one; but the skylines of history are distant, and to Africans those fifty or sixty years of foreign domination have been tremendous and traumatic. As we shall see, the impact of those years was always massive, and often terribly destructive. It left Africa with everything to build or rebuild. Many fragments of the 'old society' remained. But all too clearly they could never be put together again. Few people thought they should be. What was needed was a new society, a new pattern of daily life, a modern Africa equipped to join the modern world.'

In essence, African nationalism is manifested by efforts to prevent the reimposition of any form of external domination be it via political, economic, or military means. It is not particularly oriented on the nation-state, of which there are few in Africa, but rather on the continent as a whole. In practical terms, African nationalism sensitizes the continent to actions by the superpowers which appear to treat African states as less than equals.

African nationalism leads to nonalignment which is viewed as a means of self-preservation in a world of superpower confrontation. The distinguished African scholar, Ali Mazrui describes the doctrine of nonalignment:

Given the competition between the giants, and a reluctance on the part of a newly independent country to be tied to either of the two blocs, a doctrine emerged asserting the right to remain outside military entanglements and the right of diplomatic experimentation for those who are newly initiated into international politics.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps an old Swahili proverb explains the principle better: "When two elephants fight it is the grass which suffers."<sup>10</sup>

Rhetoric and actions on the part of some African leaders sometimes obscure this commitment to nonalignment. Many who proclaim the doctrine also appear to accept the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. A few others unabashedly pursue the economic benefits of capitalism. For the most part, however, the espousal of nonalignment is a device to gain assistance from both the East and the West and becomes "an exercise in balanced dependency—an assumption that a client with more than one patron was freer than a unipatronized dependent."<sup>11</sup>

In spite of its professed purpose of remaining free from political and military entanglements with either East or West, nonalignment does not preclude a state from seeking military assistance or support from either side. Thus the United States may maintain a bilateral defense executive agreement with Liberia, the French may have mutual defense treaties with some former colonies, and the Soviets may construct a base in Ethiopia. President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania explained this apparent contradiction:

We do not deny the principle that any African state has the right to ask for assistance, either military or economic, from the country of its choice. On the contrary, we assert that right—Angola, Ethiopia, Chad, Zaire, and all of us. I have that right. It is not for the West to object when Angola asks assistance from the USSR. It is not for the East to object when Djibouti asks assistance from France. And the requested country always has the right to decide whether to give that assistance.<sup>12</sup>

For a superpower wishing to enter into a military relationship with an African state, therefore, it is essential that the particular country has, or at least appears to have, freedom of choice in the matter and that the superpower presence not be extended beyond

its usefulness to that state. General Obasanjo, former head of state of Nigeria, provided constructive advice to the superpowers in his 1978 speech to the OAU summit.

In the context of foreign intervention in Africa, there are three parties involved. There are the Soviets and other Socialist countries, the Western powers, and we the Africans. If the interests of Africa are to be safeguarded, there are certain considerations which each of the parties must constantly bear in mind. To the Soviets and their friends, I should like to say that, having been invited to Africa in order to assist in the liberation struggle and the consolidation of national independence, they should not overstay their welcome. Africa is not about to throw off one colonial yoke for another. Rather, they should hasten the political, economic, and military capability of their African friends to stand on their own . . . .

To the Western powers, I say that they should act in such a way that we are not led to believe they have different concepts of independence and sovereignty for Africa and for Europe. A new Berlin-type conference is not the appropriate response to the kind of issues thrown up by the recent Kolwezi episode [in Zaire]. Paratroop drops in the twentieth century are not more acceptable to us than the gunboats of the last century were to our ancestors. Convening conferences in Europe and America to decide the fate of Africa raises too many ugly specters which should be best forgotten both in our and the Europeans' interests.<sup>1</sup>

***Sanctity of Borders.*** In spite of a paucity of true nation-states, virtually all sub-Saharan countries believe in the inviolability of national borders. These borders, drawn by Europeans in the latter part of the 19th century, often divide like peoples between or among neighboring states or include diverse peoples within one state. They also form states which may be too small to be viable or too large to be manageable. Recognizing the conflict potential of changing these borders, the OAU wisely adopted the policy of maintaining their sanctity. Nevertheless, many conflicts in Africa can be traced to some form of border problem. These include secessionist or irredentist conflicts which often lead to suppression of minority groups which is legitimized by the recognized need to preserve the borders. In general, the weight of African opinion is on the side of the party attempting to maintain the territorial integrity of its state. The United States has normally remained aloof from this type of dispute, with the major exception of various crises in Zaire. In these cases, however, the United States was criticized for its intervention because the situation was not clearly seen as a violation of borders by the rest of Africa. Rather, it was



perceived as an internal matter for Zaire, another constraint operating in the African context to be discussed below.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union has taken a more active role in such disputes, and its position has more consistently coincided with that of the OAU. For example, in the Nigerian Civil War the Soviet Union and Great Britain were the only major powers to provide military assistance to the Federal Military Government which was the side favored by the majority of African states. France and Portugal supported Biafra, and US neutrality in the dispute was perceived by some African countries as support for Biafra. Similarly the Soviet Union and its allies were seen to be protecting the sanctity of Africa's borders during the South African invasion of Angola and the Somali invasion of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.

In two other cases, the Tanzanian invasion of Uganda, and the recent Libyan incursion into Chad, African opinion has been divided. Whether this represents a shift in the sanctity of borders principle is not yet clear. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that both the United States and the Soviet Union have refrained from any overt actions in both those instances.

*Noninterference in Internal Affairs.* Often closely related to the border issue is the precept of noninterference in the internal affairs of African states, be it by other African states or external powers. This leads to awkward situations for both internal and external actors. For example, Africans were forced to suffer in silence the Idi Amin era in Uganda and, in fact, criticized the United States and others for anti-Amin statements and actions. Even when the entire free world applauded the daring Entebbe raid, Africa violently condemned the Israeli intervention because it was gross interference in the internal affairs of a fellow African state. On the other hand, the German operation in Somalia was perceived to be legitimate since it had the full support and cooperation of the Somali Government.

In an interesting corollary, African states may also take exception to attempts to shore up legal governments against internal dissension as another form of interference, as was the case in the Western interventions in Shaba Province. Nyerere makes this point:

But we must reject the principle that external powers have the right to maintain in power African Governments which are universally recognized to

be corrupt, or incompetent, or a bunch of murderers, when their peoples try to make a change. Africa cannot have its present governments frozen into position for all time by neocolonialism, or because these are cold war or ideological conflicts between big powers. The people of an individual African country have as much right to change their corrupt government in the last half of the twentieth century as, in the past, the British, French, and Russian peoples had to overthrow their own rotten regimes.<sup>14</sup>

**Majority Rule.** Another limitation on successful superpower intervention in sub-Saharan Africa is the position of the particular power on the issue of majority rule in Southern Africa. While some sub-Saharan states maintain economic relations and conduct political dialogues with South Africa, the underlying black African commitment to majority rule remains strong.

Africa has constantly accused the United States of favoring the white-ruled regimes of Southern Africa, and to a degree these accusations have been justified. Certainly the United States provided military, political, and economic support to the Portuguese Government during its African wars. While such aid was couched in terms of Portugal's importance as a NATO ally and the value of the Azores, it nonetheless facilitated Portuguese counterinsurgency efforts in its African possessions. The Byrd Amendment allowed the United States to import Rhodesian chrome in contravention of a United Nations embargo, and there was considerable sentiment in the Congress to recognize the short-lived Muzorewa Government in Zimbabwe which was viewed by most Africans as a puppet regime still under the control of Ian Smith. And finally, the continuation of economic and political relations with the Republic of South Africa is often criticized by black Africa. At the present time Africa is very suspicious of the Reagan administration because of a perceived shift from the policies of President Carter toward closer relations with the white South African regime.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union and Cuba have been recognized in Africa as the champions of majority rule because of their intervention in Angola in support of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) first against the Portuguese and then against South African invasions. General Murtala Mohammed, Nigeria's head of state at the time of the Angolan Civil War, praised Moscow and its allies at an OAU summit meeting in February 1976:

We are all aware of the heroic role which the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries have played in the struggle of the African peoples for liberation. The Soviet Union and other Socialist countries have been our traditional suppliers of arms to resist oppression, and to fight for national liberation and human dignity. On the other hand, the United States, which now sheds crocodile tears on Angola, has not only completely ignored the freedom fighters whom successive US administrations branded as terrorists, it even openly supported morally and materially the Fascist Portuguese Government. And we have no cause to doubt that the same successive American administrations continue to support the apartheid regime of South Africa whom they see as the defender of Western interest on the African Continent. How can we now be led to believe that a government with a record such as the United States has in Africa can suddenly become the defender of our interests?''

*The North-South Dialogue.* As a result of deteriorating economic trends, Africans are becoming more vocal in their demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) which would include various economic concessions from the developed world. Although still often criticized for not giving "enough" economic assistance, the United States does appear to have a comparative advantage over the Soviet Union in the economic arena. Even the Soviets admit this:

The creation of the material and technical base of socialism and communism demands colossal capital investments . . . Here [the Soviet Union] there is not and cannot be 'surplus capital' by the very economic nature of socialism. The Socialist countries have never entered into competition with capitalism in the volume of capital resources they export to the developing countries and in the existing stage of development they cannot do so.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the Third World is now linking the Soviet Union more frequently with the North in the North-South dialogue and its demands for more human development projects, increased concessional aid, and better terms. As *The New York Times* reported during the UNCTAD IV Conference in Nairobi in 1976:

They [the LDC's] resent the Soviet Union's standing aloof from such questions and insisting that the world economic disarray is a consequence of capitalist contradictions over which it has no control and for which it bears no responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

Thus it appears that superpowers wishing to enter into arms or basing agreements with African states are going to be required to pay a higher price economically. The operative question from the African point of view will be "What have you done for me lately?"

**Summary.** There are, therefore, several limitations and constraints which sub-Saharan Africa can impose on superpower intervention in Africa. It is extremely difficult to separate all of these into discrete boxes as there is considerable overlap. In general, each superpower has had success when it recognized and observed these limitations, and failure when it did not. The Soviet Union has the advantage in the political realm for as Ali Mazuri points out: "On balance it could be argued that the Soviet Union has so far always been at least a decade ahead of the USA in understanding the forces at work in the Third World."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Washington has the economic advantage over Moscow. Nevertheless, even if the superpowers are able to recognize the above limitations and their own strengths and weaknesses in dealing with them, they both have their own limitations which must be considered prior to military intervention in Africa.

## **SUPERPOWER-IMPOSED LIMITATIONS**

**General.** For the most part, major interventions by the superpowers in sub-Saharan Africa have been infrequent, the most notable exceptions being Zaire, Angola, and Ethiopia. While in some cases this has been due to the limitations imposed by the African context, in others the superpowers themselves have been constrained either by their own internal considerations or by the potential response of the other. Often these internal considerations are similar for both the United States and the Soviet Union.

**Priorities Versus Resources.** Despite growing US concern over strategic minerals, strategic lines of communication, and perceived Soviet encroachments, sub-Saharan Africa is still of secondary importance to the United States. In a world of finite resources, therefore, resources allocated to Africa have been minimal, to the point of neglect. The former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Daniel O. Graham, described this situation as follows:

Muted interest in academic circles and a public interest level ranging between utter apathy and outright disgust, provided ample political support for a foreign policy of neglect as far as sub-Saharan Africa was concerned. On the international political side, it was reasonable to expect that Soviet efforts in Africa would run afoul of the same intractable problems as had efforts of the

United States. On the economic side, it was recognized that the raw materials of Africa were important to free world economies, but it appeared that they continued to flow despite the nature of local governments. No matter what unfortunate domestic or foreign policies might be adopted by African leaders, they still had to finance them by selling raw materials to the industrialized West. On the military side, disinterest quite naturally followed lack of US political concern for the area.<sup>19</sup>

What military resources were devoted to sub-Saharan Africa by the United States have been allocated primarily to only a few states, based on potential political, economic, or strategic gains. These states have been primarily Zaire, Liberia, and Ethiopia prior to the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974. Kenya and Somalia have now replaced Ethiopia in a *quid pro quo* for military facilities access. As for the myriad of other states, these have been virtually ignored until a crisis erupted, at which time, however, previous neglect precluded any sort of US military response. The situation in Chad is a good example.

Sub-Saharan Africa is of secondary importance to the Soviet Union as well. Indeed, the poor state of the Soviet economy severely limits the allocation of scarce resources to a peripheral region. As Robert Legvold points out:

In Africa's case this is not enough to make it a region of high priority for Soviet policy—intrinsically Africa is simply not of that importance. And certainly it is not enough to justify paying much of a price. The Soviet Union, for example, is conspicuously uneager to inherit as an additional ward an economically troubled country like Mozambique. Thus, not only does it counsel against impetuous revolutionary measures that can only compound the country's difficulties, but it also apparently hopes that the West will continue to lend a hand.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, the Soviet Union, like the United States, has concentrated its resources on only a few key states such as Guinea, Mali, Angola, and Ethiopia, the latter replacing Somalia in 1975.

**Policy.** Because of Africa's low priority for both superpowers, it appears that neither has a consistent, coherent policy toward sub-Saharan Africa.

As a superpower, the United States has legitimate economic, strategic, and political interests in sub-Saharan Africa. However, since these interests are not vital to the security of the United States in the same sense as our interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, they are less clearly defined and articulated and are subject to

considerable debate at the policymaking levels. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial characterized US policy in unkind terms:

... the United States has approached Africa in a state of confusion verging on schizophrenia. We waver, hopelessly torn between our legitimate cultural, strategic, and economic affinities and a desire for popularity and moral rectitude. . . . In the end, we achieve neither rectitude nor popularity, or self-interest.<sup>21</sup>

The regionalist school tends to view Africa as a self-contained unit, vital in its own right. The globalist school of thought looks at Africa only as it pertains to other areas of the world. As a result, the perceptions of US interests and the policies based on these interests tend toward vacillation and reaction depending upon the predominant school and the situation of the moment. Currently the globalist school of thought is most influential in defining US strategic interests in Africa. In effect the globalist view Africa in a manner similar to that of the ancient Portuguese explorers: namely that Africa is an obstacle to be circumnavigated enroute to somewhere else. In the case of the Portuguese sailors, the riches of the Indies; for the United States, oil from the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, decisions on Africa are influenced by the potential impacts on the US global position rather than on Africa itself.

A potentially significant outgrowth of this policy conflict is the emergence of the Congress as a major African policymaker. The Byrd and Clark Amendments are but two examples. In the absence of an authoritative voice speaking for the Administration on Africa, this congressional role can be expected to continue, restricting US military options, often in unanticipated ways.

According to Robert Legvold, the Soviet Union has a similar dichotomy which he terms an internal stake and an external stake. Regarding the internal stake,

... this is not a stake over which the Soviet Union feels it has enormous control. By and large, as the Soviet leaders know, change in Africa unfolds at its own pace and in its own fashion. There is change that the Soviet Union would be delighted to abet and, at the margin, it doubtless sees a role for itself. This role, however, is essentially as benefactor not instigator.<sup>22</sup>

Externally, "the Soviet Union is interested in promoting the kind of change easing its access to facilities that aid in the pursuit of its military-strategic objectives beyond Africa."<sup>23</sup> Hence it is reasonable to assume similar debates on African policy in the

Kremlin as between the globalists and regionalists in Washington. For example, Dr. Peter Vanneman and Martin James have identified five schools of thought within Soviet policymaking circles.<sup>24</sup> The "revolutionists" support violent class struggle in Africa. The "evolutionists" favor alliances with the radical parties of sub-Saharan Africa leading to gradual Communist domination. As their name implies, the "isolationists" prefer to strengthen the security of the Soviet homeland rather than becoming involved in African adventures. The "internationalists" preach detente with the United States first. And the "globalists" espouse a mercantilist approach to the mineral resources of Africa as well as the rest of the Third World. Each of these schools of thought can be expected to exercise its political leverage in policy debates within the Kremlin with corresponding constraints on the ultimate policy adopted.

*Risk.* Another key limitation to superpower intervention in Africa is the potential risk, the potential for failure in the endeavor itself, as well as the potential reaction of the other superpower. Certainly the United States is not eager to confront the Soviet Union directly in Africa. In addition, the so-called Vietnam syndrome effectively limits possible US military responses even when the Soviet Union is not a factor. As former Senator Bayh has noted:

If we have learned anything from our experience in Vietnam, it is the folly of permitting a cold war mentality to lead us to choose sides in an internal conflict in a remote corner of Africa which presents no real threat to our national security or to vital national interests.<sup>25</sup>

The Soviet Union's slow calculated approach in Angola and Ethiopia implies a similar concern over confronting the United States in either country. Dimitri Simes points out that:

... the Soviet leadership has not yet used its iron fist without some restraint and caution. It appears that Brezhnev and his associates are still learning by trial and error exactly how far and how fast they can go without provoking a major confrontation with the United States. While Washington cannot seriously retard the development of Soviet military capabilities, the Kremlin's assessment of the risks and benefits of imperial meddling in the areas of international instability is quite another matter. Where there is no credible Western commitment to counteract, Moscow feels free to use force to affect fluid local conditions and, if possible, establish a foothold.<sup>26</sup>

While Moscow correctly interpreted that the threat from the

United States would be negligible during their Angolan and Ethiopian adventures, the ultimate lesson learned may be the value of prior restraint. In both of these countries the Soviets and the Cubans face protracted guerrilla war with no apparent military victory in sight. In other words, perhaps Moscow may be developing its own Vietnam syndrome over the difficulties of counterinsurgency operations in remote locales where Soviet interests are minor.

*Ideology.* Both the United States and the Soviet Union are constrained by their respective ideologies in their relationships with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Since Marx and Engels wrote little about Africa, it was left to Lenin to develop the ideological base for Afro-Soviet relations. Lenin saw colonialism as the weakest link of the capitalist system and foresaw the day when "the upheaval of a Western proletariat and the struggle of a colonial peoples would merge into a single revolutionary process directed against their common tormentors."<sup>27</sup> Therefore it was necessary, as he told the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, to recognize the "national revolutionary movements as a transitional device pending the emergence of Soviet-line Communist regimes."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, at the Third Comintern Congress one year later the only Africans to attend were white South Africans and the only blacks at the Fourth Congress in 1922 were Americans.<sup>29</sup> After World War II, Soviet interest in Africa increased as the "winds of change" began to sweep the continent. Recognizing their ignorance of Africa, a body of African scholars was developed to attempt to fit African realities into Communist ideology.

Under Khrushchev, the Soviet Union was partial to the "progressive" states such as Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. As for the "reactionary" states diplomatic relations were unthinkable, except with Ethiopia. Under the more pragmatic and business-like policies of his successor, the Soviet Union is now willing to establish normal diplomatic relations with any independent black African nation whatever its political coloration, although it still remains partial to the Socialist regimes. Diplomatic ruptures do occur between the Soviet Union and African states, sometimes even with the "progressives," primarily as a result of real or perceived meddling by the Soviets on the party level.

In the political arena, the Soviets may be described as conducting



foreign policy on two levels—"that of normal interstate diplomacy and that of revolutionary action working through party machinery and front organizations, propaganda, and subversion."<sup>30</sup> That there are sometimes contradictions between these two levels appear inconsequential to the Soviets although this has caused problems for them in the past. Relations on the party level pose more problems for the Soviets than government-to-government relations. Although there are various African governments which proclaim Marxism-Leninism or scientific socialism, there are no overt Communist Parties as such. In the absence of an indigenous Communist Party, the Soviets, therefore, conduct the equivalent of party-to-party relations with either the ruling party (usually the only party allowed in the country) or with various front organizations such as trade unions, youth groups, and student organizations. These party-to-party relations may have serious political consequences for the Soviet Union. They generate ideological disputes over such subjects as religion, the proper road to socialism, the vanguard party versus the mass party, among others. For example, despite professing his dedication to scientific socialism, General Siad Barre of Somalia had this to say about religion:

In our case, religion is not an instrument of exploitation and domination of one class by another. Ours is the religion of the common man: it stands for equality and justice. Consequently, scientific socialism as applied to our particular conditions cannot identify religion as an obstacle to the progress of the working classes and therefore cannot negate it.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the United States tends to support those African states more ideologically compatible with the concepts of democracy and capitalism, the absence of true participatory democracy on the continent apparently being irrelevant. Conversely, the United States will shun those states which use Marxist rhetoric and proclaim their dedication to various forms of socialism. Hence, Washington often misses potentially valuable opportunities to wean so-called Socialist states away from the Soviet Union. The failure to establish diplomatic relations with Angola is a case in point.

On the other hand, the United States often remains tied to its favored clients beyond the point of diminishing returns. Liberia is a good example. Having been linked to Liberia in a "special"

relationship since the middle of the 19th century, Washington is reluctant to let go even though the regime of Sergeant Doe is apt to prove embarrassing and costly to the United States. Similarly, the United States was blinded to the faults of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia until it was too late. In Zaire the situation has led to a classic case of reverse clientism. An anonymous observer explained this relationship:

No African leader owes his rise to, and retention of, power more directly to Washington's patronage than does President Mobutu. Paradoxically, he has often treated the United States with disdain and antagonism. Perhaps even more paradoxically, succeeding administrations have, on the whole, responded with timidity to his performances. The explanation lies in Mobutu's skill in presenting himself as a leader for whom there is no alternative.

Examples of this odd reverse dependence abound. Zaire has expelled two US ambassadors since he came to power in 1965; the American response to the second expulsion (in 1975) was to send Mobutu's favorite American diplomat, Sheldon Vance, back to Zaire to soothe the president's feelings and to 'introduce' the proposed successor before the routine request for agreement was dispatched through diplomatic channels. In effect, Mobutu was given a personnel veto over who would represent the United States in Kinshasa. The well-known fact that Mobutu received a regular stipend from the CIA during Zaire's formation years did not deter him from publicly charging the agency in 1975 with trying to overthrow his regime or, according to John Stockwell, from actually imprisoning the CIA-connected officers in the Zaire army. Most important, he has been manipulatively resistant to American advice and pleas concerning the state of his economy and the declining standard of living of the Zairian people, not to mention latter-day American illusions that it is possible to engender respect for human rights within the kind of social and political system existing in Zaire."

From the African point of view, therefore, all the African leader has to do is dress his speeches in the appropriate ideological cloak to entice the particular superpower into a relationship from which it can extricate itself only with great difficulty.

*Public Opinion.* Another limitation on US intervention in Africa is public opinion to include the media and the Congress. (This limitation presumably does not affect the Soviet Union.)

In a Gallup Poll conducted in 1978 for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, only 4 percent of the American public felt that Africa should be an important focus of US foreign policy." And while 44 percent favor giving foreign aid to sub-Saharan Africa, 57 percent worry that this will lead to US military involvement in the

region.<sup>34</sup> Another survey taken in 1979 "found the average American's impressions of Africa documented by stereotype images of natives and wild animals, and by perceptions of widespread poverty."<sup>35</sup>

Another poll conducted by William J. Foltz in 1979 surveyed members of the Council on Foreign Relations and members of various committees affiliated with the Council, an elite group which presumably is better informed on Africa. The results, however, seem consistent with the broader polls.

The 2,295 respondents to this survey have spoken as individual Americans with unusually strong backgrounds and interests in foreign affairs, not on behalf of their government or of any organization. Their responses suggest that elite Americans are, as a group, both concerned and uncertain about Africa and American policy toward Africa. African issues produce significantly varied reactions which are rooted as much in general political ideology as in details of the African situation. Overall, most policy preferences are "conservative" in the nonideological sense: there is little sense of excitement or gain in Africa; rather, one senses a widespread disquiet that unfriendly forces are treading on a Western preserve where they have no legitimate business, coupled with a reluctance to get heavily committed. The South African regime, like the Soviets and Cubans, generates deep disapproval, but little willingness to employ forceful means to do anything about it.<sup>36</sup>

If anything, public opinion appears to tilt slightly toward the white minority regimes. Kenneth Adelman argues that:

... the American public at large is marching in the opposite direction from its leaders. Harris polls reveal that the public supported by 62-12 percent "black majority" rule in Southern Africa in May 1976 during the Ford administration. By June 1977, after the Carter administration had been in office several months, such support had dwindled to 46-25 percent. In the most recent poll of August 1977, when the Carter administration's initiatives were in full swing, the American people opposed by 52-41 percent the President's policy of advocating that Rhodesian whites turn their government over to the black majority.<sup>37</sup>

To quote the Foltz Poll again:

If an American administration were to decide to adopt a policy of forceful pressures against South Africa, it seemingly would have to find its major public support among groups not represented, or poorly represented, in the elite population surveyed here, particularly blue-collar workers, unionists, and blacks. It should expect to encounter opposition from much of the Senate, whose social background and outside reference groups greatly

resemble the population surveyed here. Overcoming such opposition would require strong leadership which could project a coherent view of African policy as part of a global foreign policy. This survey strongly suggests that such a view has not yet been projected to the most attentive and influential part of the American public.<sup>11</sup>

It appears that most Americans have little knowledge of, or concern over, sub-Saharan Africa. Even as Vietnam retreats from the American consciousness it is difficult to project significant popular support for military intervention in Africa. This is reflected in the Congress where the Clark Amendment still prevents any such activity in Angola and where facilities access agreements with Kenya and Somalia are of special concern.

*Summary.* Beyond the limitations of the African dynamic, the superpowers are further constrained by their own considerations, both domestic and external. Since Africa is not of vital interest to either and—in the case of the United States—not of interest to the public, the superpowers commit minimal resources concentrated on a few key states. These states are usually compatible ideologically, but this provides the seeds of reverse clientism, possibly leading to involvement in internal or regional conflict. And finally, each superpower bases its decisions to intervene to a large measure on the anticipated response of the other.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*General.* There is little doubt that the United States is going to become more involved militarily on the African Continent in the coming years. As in other regions, political and economic relationships will often lead to military connections. Certainly the facilities access and security assistance agreements with Somalia and Kenya imply a desire for long-term military relationships with those countries. Similarly, there appears to be no weakening of our military relations with old friends such as Liberia and Zaire, among others, despite the potential political liabilities. Remote military possibilities include antiterrorist operations, evacuation missions, or perhaps some form of peacekeeping. Indeed, a continued Soviet military presence in sub-Saharan Africa almost necessarily dictates an increased US military involvement.

*Recommendations.* The United States must be aware of the limitations of such military involvement and intervention if it

wishes to increase the chances for success. Accordingly, the United States should:

- Recognize that African nationalism is a more potent force in sub-Saharan Africa than either communism or Western concepts of democracy. Africa is not about to allow itself to be colonized for the second time by either the East or the West.

- Analyze the African dynamics operating in any given situation to determine the African position prior to military intervention. If necessary, seek advice from African states recognized as opinion leaders—Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, and others. Pay attention to the OAU.

- Recognize African socialist rhetoric for what it is—mainly rhetoric. As Helen Kitchen put it:

American policymakers should not make life more difficult for African leaders by assuming that rhetoric equals fact, especially on issues involving Southern Africa, relations with the former colonial powers, African unity, human and political rights, and economic ideology. As a distinguished African noted recently, there is a 'consistent inconsistency' between what African politicians must say for the record and the pragmatism with which they often act—particularly when economic realities are involved.<sup>39</sup>

- Push harder for majority rule in Southern Africa. The United States was able to undercut some of the prestige gained by the Soviet Union in Angola by its forceful role in the negotiations over Namibia, at least initially. The current impasse threatens our ability to play a decisive role in the future and leaves the door open for Soviet penetration.

- Provide more support for the South in the North-South dialogue, i.e., lead from our economic strengths. Economic development is the most pressing problem in sub-Saharan Africa today. Only the United States has the resources and the technological know-how to alleviate some of these problems to any substantial degree. Certainly the Soviet Union cannot compete with the United States in the economic arena for as Kitchen points out:

Although the name of Karl Marx is often invoked by African politicians for one purpose or another, the fact is that Marx never analyzed African society or an African-like situation. Moreover, no African who calls himself a Marxist has yet demonstrated how the problems of a single African country could be resolved in a Marxist context.<sup>40</sup>

Conversely, the United States must also recognize that it cannot

solve all of Africa's economic problems. Kenneth Adelman puts this in perspective:

While sounding ideal in theory, this approach would prove quixotic and ineffective in practice. Pacification in Africa would flop as it did in Asia. No conceivable assistance program could alleviate the massive suffering in Africa, with over 60 percent of the UN's 'least developed' nations. Even if billions were available for aid—which they are surely not—African countries still lack the infrastructure to absorb these funds effectively.<sup>41</sup>

- Reconsider its priorities for allocating scarce resources to sub-Saharan Africa, in addition to increasing their allocation. Past reliance on the so-called "bellwether" states has intimately linked the United States with countries such as Zaire, Liberia, and pre-1974 Ethiopia which have turned out to be more millstones rather than bellwethers. For example, aid to the front line states is currently miniscule. However, emphasis on these states could result in increased contact, and perhaps influence, with the Southern African liberation groups, preempt the Soviet Union from increasing its position with these groups, decrease these states' dependence on South Africa, and send an unmistakable signal to Pretoria.

- Formulate a policy for Africa that is more coherent than "a cacophony of discordant voices from various power bases in Washington."<sup>42</sup> This policy must strike a balance between the regionalists and globalists and be backed up by resources as noted above.

- Beware of the potential for reverse clientism as exemplified by Zaire. This is especially true as our relationships with Kenya and Somalia mature. Internal and regional instability in the Horn of Africa offers great potential to engulf an unwary patron in conflict not of its own choosing.

- Consider reinstituting Military Assistance Programs in Africa. African countries do have valid military needs which the United States can legitimately satisfy. However, often these states can purchase these requirements only to the detriment of their fragile economies and domestic stability.

- Better inform the American public about sub-Saharan Africa. While the chances of the commitment of US combat forces to the continent is remote, only a knowledgeable public can ultimately approve such a measure or even a significant increase in aid to this region.

- Be patient. There are no easy or quick solutions to Africa's problems. Both the United States and the Soviet Union will continue to suffer reversals as they attempt to negotiate this immense region of the world. The pitfalls are many and the rewards are few, for as Helen Kitchen concludes:

Africa must travel a long road as it seeks out its ultimate post-colonial and post-neocolonial identity. It is a road that will be crisscrossed by many experimental shortcuts that will dead-end and be abandoned. American policy should be based on the premise that Africa is not about to be won—or lost—by anybody.<sup>43</sup>

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